

Matthew 1:1-3 ; Joshua 2

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 November 2017

Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 00] In the genealogy of Jesus, there in Matthew chapter 1, we witness the marvelous manner in which God's surprising grace is weaved throughout the story of God's fulfilling of His promise to send His Messiah, Jesus Christ, Jesus the Messiah, the one who came into the world to save sinners, and that truth concerning Jesus and the purpose of His coming is also illustrated in these stories of grace of those who were His forebears, those who formed part of His family line.

And last week, as I mentioned just a few moments ago, we met two of those who formed part of that inner circle, as it were, that line from which was born the Messiah.

We met Judah and Tamar. Today, we need to fast forward some 500 years from the time of the events that we looked at last Sunday evening.

And that 500 years that we're fast forwarding through begins with Judah and his brothers and family taking up residence in Egypt.

You remember the story, there was famine in the land, and so through the influence of their younger brother Joseph, who was in a position of prominence in Egypt, the family is able to take up residence in Egypt.

[1 : 32] And then they remained there for 400 years. And in the course of those 400 years, towards the beginning of it, or certainly a few decades into that period of time, they became slaves in the land.

And Joseph was no longer remembered there in the land. And towards the end of those 400 years, God raised up Moses as the deliverer of Israel.

And the people were miraculously redeemed from slavery. And we know the miracles that accompanied that redemption, only for them to spend another 40 years wandering in the desert of Sinai.

The very location that was the scene of that horrific terrorist attack last week in Egypt, in the Sinai Peninsula.

And it was round about there that the people were wandering for these 40 years. But now as we rejoin the story, and under the leadership of Joshua, the people of Israel are on the brink of taking possession of the promised land.

[2 : 42] Though they're still on the east bank of the Jordan River. They still haven't crossed the Jordan into the promised land. But when they do cross the Jordan, their first obstacle will be the stronghold of Jericho.

And it's here that we meet the next surprising forebear of Jesus, Rahab. And let's just call her Rahab. She's generally known, even in the biblical account, as Rahab the prostitute.

And though that is accurate, her name is Rahab. And let's call her, in as much as we're able, just by her name, Rahab. So I want you to listen to the story of Rahab.

A story of God's redeeming, transforming, and very especially exalting grace. Now we've read the chapter. And really, pretty much everything we know about Rahab is contained within that chapter.

Though we do, in the case of Rahab, very helpfully have further insight given to us. In Hebrews chapter 11, where we have this gallery of men and women of faith.

[3 : 45] And also in the book of James, where she's also made reference to. And we'll make reference to those two references in due course. But really what I want to do is tell the story.

Simply tell the story of this woman and the manner in which God graciously worked in her life. Rahab, as we meet her at the beginning of this account, was a woman far from God.

We know nothing of her infancy and childhood, but I think we can confidently affirm one thing. That it was not marked by bedtime stories recounting the acts and character of the God of Israel.

Rahab was far from a God that she knew nothing about. And Rahab was a woman who belonged to a people far from God.

And at enmity with God. We meet Rahab on the eve of the destruction of her people. And we recoil at the violence that this destruction would involve.

[4 : 50] But we also acknowledge the reason for the destruction of the Canaanites. A reason that were given in Scripture. And on two or three occasions.

But we'll limit ourselves to reading one of those occasions. Deuteronomy chapter 9 and verses 4 and 5. We have explained the reason for the destruction of the Canaanites.

That, as I say, is difficult for us to stomach, really. But here we have the reason given. So, Deuteronomy chapter 9 and verses 4 and 5.

Let's just quickly read what is said there. After the Lord your God has driven them out before you. That is the inhabitants of Canaan. Do not say to yourself. So, this is being addressed to Israel.

To the Israelites. And God is saying, don't say to yourself. The Lord has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness. No. It is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is going to drive them out before you.

[5 : 51] And the explanation goes on. But I think that captures the idea. God is saying it's the reason why these people were destroyed. It wasn't some random, gratuitous act of violence.

This was an act of judgment against wicked peoples. And Rahab is one of them. She is a member of this people, of this tribe of the Canaanites, resident there in the stronghold of Jericho.

But Rahab was not only guilty by association or by the accident of her birth, if we can use that language. Rahab was herself a woman whose lifestyle was marked by sin.

She was a prostitute. Now we know nothing of what led Rahab to take this path in life. She was perhaps more sinned against than sinner.

Perhaps she was a victim of men who left her with little in the way of choices in her life. We simply don't know. It's hard to imagine that she freely chose to sacrifice her life, pleasuring men in sexual encounters devoid of love and affection.

[7 : 06] Rahab was a woman far from God. I wonder if Rahab is so different from countless men and women in Aberdeen today.

Far from a God they know little about. Part of a people or generation. Far from God. And at enmity with God. Rahab was a woman far from God.

But Rahab was also a woman pursued by God. God's pursuit of Rahab is grounded in His gracious election of Rahab from before the foundation of the world.

But in Rahab's experience, God's pursuit begins with Rahab acquiring knowledge concerning God. Now we suggested that when she was a child, she would have known nothing of the God of Israel.

But that situation changes. Circumstances that we're not privy to provide her with an opportunity to discover something about this God.

[8 : 08] The living and true God. And let's just read what she says about Him. There in chapter 2 and verses 8 to 11. What does she know about God?

What does she reveal about what she knows about God in these words that she addresses to the spies? Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them, I know.

So she has clear knowledge. I know that the Lord has given this land to you. And that a great fear of you has fallen on us. So that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you.

We have heard. How they'd heard? Who had told them? We don't know. We have heard of how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt.

And what you did to Zion and Og, the two kings of the Amorites, east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. And as she goes on, and then very significantly in verse 11, in the second half of the verse, she declares, For the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

[9 : 21] She's pursued by God in this fashion as God provides her with knowledge concerning himself. Now, it's a remarkable and intriguing thing to consider the information that Rahab, and it would have seen all the townspeople of Jericho, were privy to.

How did they know about the crossing of the Red Sea? A miracle that had occurred 40 years before and hundreds of miles away on another continent. How did they know about that?

But they did. They had heard about these great events. But God doesn't only provide Rahab with information. He sends her messengers.

Now, some stories in the Bible and elsewhere can provoke more questions than they provide answers. And in the case of the story of Rahab, I'm left wondering about one question.

I think we do have lots of answers in this story. But there's only one question that intrigues me, and that is I'm left wondering what the military secrets that the spies who were sent by Joshua actually discovered, that Joshua would have taken into account as he planned the assault of Jericho.

[10 : 34] As we read through the account, and we obviously haven't had the time to do that this evening, it's difficult to see in what way anything that the spies would have discovered would have been used by Joshua in the manner in which he conducts his conquest of Jericho.

And it does make me wonder if perhaps in God's providence the primary purpose of the spies heading to Jericho wasn't really to secure classified military information, but to serve as messengers of Yahweh to this Canaanite woman, Rahab.

God was pursuing Rahab, and He pursues her by providing her knowledge concerning Himself, and He pursues her by sending these spies as His own appointed messengers to Rahab, and to provide Rahab the opportunity to cast herself upon the mercy of the God of Israel.

Is that not a heartwarming reminder of God's sovereign ordering of all things for the ingathering and the blessing of His people? All resources are at His people. All resources are at His disposal in His gracious pursuit of those whom He would save and draw to Himself.

Rahab was far from God, but she was pursued by God all the way to a brothel in Jericho where she plied her sorry trade.

[12 : 12] And when we maybe just for a moment think about those spies, they're not our primary concern this evening. When we think about the danger that they exposed themselves to, where they went in fulfilling their God-given commission, to what extent are we willing to go as messengers of God and of grace to the difficult places?

So we have Rahab, far from God, pursued by God, but also afraid of God. When we first meet Rahab, as we meet her here in the chapter in Joshua, what grabs our attention is not her faith, but her fear.

She's terrified of the God of Israel. What does she say to the spies? A great fear has fallen on us. All who live in this country are melting in fear because of you, because of the Israelites, because of your God, because of the great power that He has displayed.

We're terrified of you. Let's just pause for a moment and engage in some informed speculation of what the reaction of the spies might have been to Rahab's report and the manner in which he reported the fear of the citizens of Jericho.

You see, the very curious thing is that the words Rahab employs, not only the truth that she presents about the fear of the Canaanites, but the very words that she employs are words that come straight from the song of Moses and Miriam, penned some 400 years before and recorded for us in the book of Exodus.

[13 : 54] Let's just notice one part of that song and see how Rahab, unbeknown to herself, is using the very words of that song. In Exodus chapter 15 and verses 15 and 16, we read the relevant part of that song of Moses and Miriam.

Exodus chapter 15 and verse 15, And of course this song is anticipating what God will do in granting the promised land to His people. And there we read, The chiefs of Edom will be terrified.

The leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling. The people of Canaan, the people of Canaan, Rahab, a Canaanite woman, the people of Canaan will melt away.

Terror and dread will fall upon them. And so it goes on. Of Canaan it is said that their people will melt away in fear. And that is the very expression that Rahab uses in describing her people to the spies.

We are melting with fear. And really what I'm speculating is of the spies as they heard that language, as they heard that vocabulary. Is it not possible that the song of Moses and Miriam, the Israelites continued to sing as they made their weedy way through the wilderness.

[15 : 16] And perhaps they would have sung with ever more excitement as the day of conquest dawned. Who knows if the day before they had not sung that song, these spies.

And now they come to Jericho and they hear the words of the song in the lips, on the lips of this prostitute in Jericho. Well, what a remarkable thing, if that is indeed the way in which it transpired for these spies.

Rahab is afraid of God. You say, well, that's not good, is it? It's very good. In the case of Rahab, this is a very good thing, that she is afraid of God.

You see, it's fear that drives Rahab to cast herself upon the mercy of the God of Israel. Fear is a good thing if it is well founded and correctly addressed.

Which was the case on both counts with Rahab. Her fear was well founded. Her people were to be destroyed. And it was correctly addressed. She goes to the one who is able to deliver her from this awful prospect.

[16 : 25] So Rahab is far from God. She's pursued by God. And she's afraid of God. But that brings us to a wonderful moment in the story of grace. Rahab puts her faith in God.

And let's just explore the elements of Rahab's saving faith. And make no mistake, Rahab was saved by God through faith. It has ever been so. Rahab's faith is marked by knowledge.

Now, we've already noticed that. But I want to just dig a little deeper. Rahab possesses knowledge of God as redeemer. She knows of how God had redeemed His people from Egypt.

How He had opened up the Red Sea and saved them from the pursuing Egyptians. And so she knows this God, this God of Israel, is a saving God.

He's a redeeming God. She knows that about Him. But she also possesses knowledge of God as a judge and a warrior. Indeed, that same occasion, the crossing of the Red Sea, the Israelites were redeemed, but the Egyptians were drowned.

[17 : 30] And then, of course, she speaks of events much nearer in the much more recent past. The battles that had been fought and conquest of Zion and Og, the kings on the east side of the Jordan.

And how God had exercised His power in judgment over these peoples. And not only does she know these things, but she comes to a startling and correct conclusion concerning the sovereignty and uniqueness of the God of Israel.

Back there in Joshua and in verse 11, when we heard of it, our hearts sank and everyone's courage failed because of you.

For the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. This is no territorial deity. This is the God who rules and reigns supreme in heaven and on earth.

Which is really a way of saying, overall. And Rahab has come to this conclusion concerning the God of Israel. Did this knowledge save Rahab?

[18 : 48] Well, the knowledge didn't save her. The striking thing is that her neighbors had the same knowledge. In the language she uses, she always speaks in the first person plural. We know this.

We have heard. We know about the Red Sea. We know about these conquests. Many of the good citizens of Jericho knew these truths. They knew the facts.

I don't know if they came to that same conclusion that Rahab did. That God was sovereign in heaven and on earth. That seems to be more a conclusion she had come to.

But they had the facts that she had. And they weren't saved. They were destroyed. So, this knowledge by itself didn't save Rahab. You see, Rahab's faith is marked not only by knowledge but by trust.

Rahab and Rahab alone among the good citizens of Jericho acts on her knowledge. And puts her trust in the God of Israel. I say Rahab and Rahab alone.

[19 : 46] Perhaps that's unfair. There were, of course, others who joined with her. But she's very much the one who takes the lead in depositing her trust in the God of Israel. In casting herself upon the mercy of the God of Israel.

How does she do that? Well, she turns from her own people and from their disobedience. You know, the writer to the Hebrews, when he speaks about Rahab, he says, he makes that very point.

That she turns from a disobedient people. And she turns to the God of Israel. She turns in intimidious and tentative trust to the God of Israel.

And this turning is marked by a sure hope and a certain faith in a God she is only beginning to know. We know that her faith was of that quality, of that nature, marked by a sure hope and a certain faith.

And we know that's true because that's what we're told in the book of Hebrews. In Hebrews chapter 11, where we have this gallery of men and women of faith. The chapter begins by describing all of those who will follow.

[20 : 57] And it says, the following, it says this. Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.

And then, of course, the ancients are listed there. And among them is Rahab. So what is said there in verse 1 of chapter 11 is true of Rahab. Rahab, her faith is marked by knowledge, but it's also marked by trust in the God of Israel.

Rahab was confronted with her hour of decision. What would she do as the spies appeared in her home? And there was an opportunity. What would she do? Would she cling to her own people?

Or would she cling to the people of God? Would she cling to her own gods? Or would she turn to the God of Israel? This was her hour of decision. And by the grace of God, she casts herself upon the mercy of the God of Israel.

Of course, that's a challenge that confronts us all. Will we turn away from the world and its ways? And the idols that this world would beguile us with?

[22 : 10] Or will we turn to the God of Israel? To the God who is altogether trustworthy and who will never disappoint. But Rahab's faith is thirdly marked by works.

By knowledge, by trust, and by works. You see, the expression of her trust, the evidence of her trust, is the kindness that she shows to the spies.

And of course, this is also something that the writer to the Hebrews makes very evident when he is speaking about Rahab in Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 31.

Listen to what is said by the writer of Rahab. By faith, the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

That is, her fellow citizens of Jericho. Her trust is then fleshed out, as it were, evidence in works that she performs, the kindness that she shows to the spies.

[23 : 15] And so we see in her faith, we detect knowledge, we detect trust, we detect works, the grounds, the exercise, and the evidence of saving faith. Rahab is far from God.

She's pursued by God. She's afraid of God. She puts her faith in God. And all of this leads us to the final and glorious chapter of the story of grace, a chapter that is, in a sense, still being written.

Rahab is embraced and exalted by God. And God embraces her and exalts her with an almost scandalous generosity. And just enjoy with me as we recount something of God's embracing and exalting of Rahab.

We'll need to fleetingly move through the many multifaceted elements of this embracing and exalting of Rahab the prostitute.

The first thing that we can say about Rahab as she is embraced and exalted by God is that Rahab is used by God as a savior for her own family. Some commentators have highlighted, I think, a helpful comparison between chapter 1 and chapter 2 of Joshua.

[24 : 26] In chapter 1, you have Joshua, the representative head of the people of God, who is appointed by God to secure their salvation. And those who would align themselves with Joshua will inherit the promised land.

And in chapter 2, you have something similar, but it's Rahab. Rahab is the one to whom others must align. Those family members, we read the chapter, they needed to be in the house with Rahab.

If they were in her house, they would be safe. But if they were outside the house, they would die. And so Rahab serves as a leader among her people, God's means of securing the salvation of others.

And in that way, she is exalted. She's put alongside Joshua in this remarkable way. But then, of course, Rahab is also welcomed into God's family. Now, God's embrace of Rahab is immediate and fulsome.

But God's people, as is often the case, take a little longer. Notice what is said about her in chapter 6. It's one further bit of information we have about Rahab, just jumping a few chapters on in the book of Joshua.

[25 : 37] So, in Joshua chapter 6 and verse 23, we read, they brought out, that is the spies, they brought out her entire family. So, Jericho is being conquered.

And then we read, they brought out her entire family and put them in a place outside the camp of Israel. That seems quite striking, the language. Yes, they keep their promise.

Rahab is saved. Her family are saved. All those in the house are saved. But where are they placed? Well, they're placed outside the camp of Israel. And then the writer continues, and he takes us to his present day as he's looking back on these events.

And what does the writer say of Rahab? Then at the end of verse 25, and she lives among the Israelites to this day. So, little by little, these very suspicious Israelites began to bring her in to the people of God.

Of course, God had already embraced her, but God's people, well, they just took a little bit longer to get it. But she's welcomed into God's family. But of course, there's so much more here about Rahab being welcomed into God's family because Rahab's integration involved a new love and a new family, or a bigger family, in addition to the existing family members.

[27 : 01] Rahab married a man called Salmon. Now, he's mentioned there in the genealogy in Matthew. But there's more to Salmon than a curious name.

And let's just investigate a little and discover more about this character who fell in love with and married Rahab. Now, in Matthew chapter 1, we discover that Salmon was the son of Nashon.

You can see that in the genealogy. Now, of Nashon, we learn a little more in the book of Numbers in chapters 2 and verses 3 and 4. So, just bear with me as we quickly just discover a little bit more about this man, Salmon.

But first of all, his father, Nashon. So, Numbers chapter 2, verses 3 and 4. And here you have an account of as the people of Israel are leaving Egypt, they're being arranged according to their different tribes.

And we read in verses 3 and 4 of chapter 2 of Numbers, on the east towards the sunrise, the division of the camps of Judah are to encamp under their standard. The leader of the people of Judah is Nashon, son of Amminadab.

[28 : 09] Amminadab, who also features in the genealogy. His division numbers 74,600 people. So, Nashon isn't just anybody. He is the prince of Judah.

He is responsible for these 75,000 fighting men. Now, if you work at what that would relate to in terms of population, for every man there were four or five children and women and aged folk, well, you're talking about a very significant population.

So, Nashon was one of the greats in Israel. And when he dies, of course, he dies in the course of these 40 years in the desert, as they all did with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, who takes his place?

It's Salmon. Salmon is the prince of Judah. You know, Rahab doesn't just marry any Israelite. She marries a prince. She marries a prince of the tribe of Judah.

That's who she marries. That's the extent to which she's integrated into the people of God. It's a remarkable thing to consider that here we have a royal marriage between a prince and a prostitute.

- [29 : 22] Mark Twain may have given us a fictional story of a prince and a pauper, but only the God of grace could give us a true story of a prince and a prostitute.

Rahab is welcomed into the family of God. Rahab also, as we think of the manner in which God exalts her, Rahab is a fulfillment and foretaste of God's gracious promises and purposes for all the nations.

God's covenant with Abraham anticipated the blessing that would extend through Israel to the nations of the world. And Rahab, like Tamar before her, is a kind of fulfillment and first fruits of that promise.

And a foretaste of what would come in the gospel age. A foretaste of the ingathering of the Gentiles. Gentiles like you and me. Rahab is declared by God a heroine of the faith.

We've already read in Hebrews chapter 11 how she figures among those who live by faith. Who could have imagined that a Canaanite prostitute would occupy a place of honor in God's gallery of faith?

- [30 : 28] And yet here she is, exalted by her God of grace. And Rahab is placed by God shoulder to shoulder with the patriarch Abraham. The other and the only other reference that we have to Rahab is in James chapter 2 and verses 23 to 25.

And we won't read the verses for a reason of time. But let me just explain really what James is doing in these three verses in chapter 2 of his letter.

James, as he's doing throughout his letter, is explaining the interplay between faith and works in God's purposes of salvation. And who does he point to in explaining that?

Well, who better than to speak of Abraham? The prime example. Abraham believed God. And it was credited to him as righteousness. But Abraham also offered his son Isaac.

And so you have faith. You have belief. But that belief accompanied by the offering of his son. The work that he performs, if you wish. And who could argue with the example of the patriarch?

- [31 : 35] But then James, perhaps with a wry and mischievous smile as he penned the words, writes in his epistle, In the same way.

I'm just speaking about Abraham. Well, in the same way was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous. So you have this remarkable piece of text where James is saying, Here's Abraham, the great patriarch of Israel.

In the same way, Rahab. A Gentile, Canaanite woman. Rahab the prostitute. She's on the same level, if you wish. In God's estimation, exalted to this high place.

But then finally, Rahab is made and honored. A mother of Messiah. That's where we began in Matthew chapter 1.

And we return to where we began our story. The geniality of Jesus. And here we find Rahab. A mother of Messiah. Jesus.

- [32 : 40] This is the way God rolls. Not just with Rahab. Our God, your God, is a God of grace. Who saves and embraces and exalts his people to the very highest places.

And I read the same words that I read last week from Psalm 113. Who is like the Lord our God? The one who sits enthroned on high. Who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth.

He raises the poor from the dust. And lifts the needy from the ash heap. He seats them with princes. With the princes of their people. He settles the barren woman in her home as a happy mother of children.

Praise the Lord. The God of grace. Who embraces and exalts the likes of Rahab. Thank God that he has and is exalting you. And go and invite others to trust in the God.

Who delights in embracing and exalting the most unlikely. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. We thank you that in it we find you portrayed and presented as the God who you are.

[33 : 45] The God of grace. The God who saves. The God who redeems. The God who fixes his eyes on the most unlikely. The God who pursues.

And the God who draws to himself. We thank you for Rahab. We thank you for the work of grace in her life. We thank you for the manner in which she was embraced and exalted by yourself.

And we pray that you would forgive us. That we, unlike you, so often are wary of those who seem different. Who seem difficult.

Who seem to be involved in a lifestyle and activities that we're uncomfortable with. And we keep our distance. And how different from our God.

And so we pray that we would know something of what it is to have your heart. In seeing those around us. Far from God. And yet, those who are to be and will be the objects of your grace.

[34 : 46] As you would reach down to embrace and to exalt them. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.